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C O N F I D E N T I A L KAMPALA 000492

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: UGANDA: PRESIDENT MUSEVENI GOES TO IRAN

Classified By: Economic Officer Dan Langenkamp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The Government of Uganda has confirmed that President Yoweri Museveni will visit Iran May 16-18. Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary James Mugume said in a briefing with U.S. Mission staff that the trip had been delayed several times over the last two years and that its timing has nothing to do with any perceived shift in U.S. policy towards Iran. The visit has a strategic focus, said Mugume, and is part of Ugandan efforts to cultivate and balance relationships with a wide array of countries, including those in the Arab world. Uganda, he insisted, shares U.S. concerns about Iran's nuclear program and support for extremism, and will use the visit to try to persuade Iran to join the international consensus on issues like supporting the transitional government in Somalia. The visit does not appear to indicate a shift in Uganda's foreign policy. Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa is tentatively planning a visit to Washington in July. End Summary.

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Timing: No Link to New U.S. Administration  
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12. (SBU) The Charge d'Affaires (CDA), the Defense Attache, and Economic Officer met May 13 with Ugandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Permanent Secretary (PS) James Mugume at the latter's request. Mugume called the meeting to officially inform the USG that Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni will visit Tehran beginning May 16.

13. (SBU) Mugume emphasized that the timing of the trip had nothing to do with recent offers by the new U.S. administration to engage in direct talks with Iran. He said that the visit had been in the works for about two years. After having been postponed several times, the date was finally fixed when Museveni met with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Muttaki earlier this year at the African Union summit. Though "everyone is putting out the olive branch" to Iran, he stated, the trip was not timed to coincide with any perceived policy change in the United States. Two Iranian Presidents have visited Uganda in the past, he noted, while Museveni until now had never visited Tehran.

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Strategic Interests, Commercial Ties  
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14. (C) Mugume emphasized the strategic purpose of Museveni's visit to Tehran. Uganda maintains relations with the Arab world, he said, and wants to ensure that these are balanced by continued relations with Iran. Mugume said that Uganda wants to maintain its credibility with a diverse set of actors as a non-permanent UN Security Council member, a member of the African Union, and as the current chair of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Uganda shares U.S. concerns about Iran's development of nuclear weapons and its support for international terrorist groups such as al Shabaab, he said, particularly given Uganda's lead role in international peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, where al Shabaab is active. A key goal of the visit to Tehran, he said, was to press Iran to join the international consensus

in supporting the Transitional Federal Government in Somalia.

¶5. (C) Mugume insisted the visit was purely bilateral and unrelated to Uganda's position as a UN Security Council member. He said that the Ugandan delegation would make no agreements if Tehran presses it to remove or soften the UN sanctions against Iran stemming from its nuclear program. He also said security cooperation would not be on the agenda. (Note: We understand Uganda's Inspector General of Police recently visited Iran. The visit was discreet and little is known about what may have resulted from it. End note).

¶6. (SBU) Mugume said that Uganda also has commercial interests at stake, and will explore Iranian assistance and participation in the development of Uganda's fledgling oil and gas industry. (Note: Uganda, which has discovered sizeable oil reserves in the Albertine Rift valley, will begin producing oil in 2011. It has a large need for investment in oil-related infrastructure, particularly in a new pipeline, oil refinery or both and may be gauging interest in the Iranians in investment. Uganda is also reaching out to established oil producers to provide assistance building the capacity of government regulators for the oil industry. End note). The two countries would also discuss a tractor production project, as well as other agricultural modernization issues. He noted the Ministers of Energy, Finance and Trade would also participate in the visit.

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Charge: U.S. Policy Not Changed, Visit Not Helpful  
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¶7. (C) The CDA told Mugume that U.S. policy toward Iran has not changed, particularly given the regime's continued defiance of UN Security Council resolutions on its nuclear program, its hostility towards Israel, and its support for extremism in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The CDA noted that the U.S. appreciated being informed of the visit, but stated that it could undermine the bilateral U.S.-Ugandan partnership by raising questions and concerns amongst U.S. policymakers and in the U.S. Congress about Uganda's intentions. Mugume did not dispute any of these points, and said Uganda shares the same concerns about Iran's nuclear program and its support for extremism. Mugume said the visit could be helpful because it gives Uganda an opportunity to counsel Tehran to moderate its behavior. "We have to engage these guys," Mugume said.

¶8. (SBU) Throughout the meeting, Mugume downplayed the significance of the visit and consistently tried to highlight the benefits that engaging Tehran could bring to its efforts to help stabilize Somalia. By way of conclusion, and in order to emphasize Uganda's high regard for the United States, he noted that Foreign Minister Samuel Kutesa is tentatively planning a visit to Washington in July.

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Comment  
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¶9. (C) We do not believe the Museveni visit to Iran, while irritating, is a significant shift in the direction of Uganda's foreign policy. The visit is another example of President Museveni trying to punch above Uganda's weight by playing the role of senior statesman. What he and his MFA fail to fully understand, however, is that in trying to juggle such a wide and diverse array of bilateral relationships, and particularly when it beds down with a regime like Iran's and can't produce results that benefit the international community, Uganda risks sullyng its own reputation.

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